

Marketing of Library Services in the Digital Era: A Study of Academic Libraries in Mumbai

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Abstract

This study explores marketing strategies in 13 NAAC 'A' grade academic libraries in Mumbai, based on surveys of librarians and 390 students. The findings reveal that marketing is viewed as essential, with social media, student collaborations, and posters being the most used strategies. Libraries face challenges like limited budgets, insufficiently skilled staff, and inadequate infrastructure. Students prefer Instagram updates, practical content such as study tips and book recommendations, and show strong interest in library events. The study highlights the need for digital engagement, innovative approaches like gamification, and dedicated marketing teams to enhance visibility, resource use, and community engagement.

Keywords: Library Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Student Engagement, Library Promotions, Digital Marketing in Libraries, Gamification in Libraries, Library Visibility, User-Centered Services, Innovative Marketing Strategies, Library Resource Utilization, NAAC 'A' Grade Libraries, Technology-Driven Library Marketing

Introduction:

Academic libraries in India are evolving to balance their historical legacy with modern digital demands. From ancient manuscript repositories to contemporary, technology-integrated learning centres, libraries continue to adapt to the changing information needs of students and faculty. With the help of modern technology and marketing, libraries can transform into dynamic learning hubs that meet 21st-century educational challenges. However, are not able to achieve desired results due to a lack of a formal marketing plan, structured approach, creative strategies, budget constraints, and user involvement.

In Mumbai's western suburbs, NAAC 'A' grade libraries face the dual challenge of preserving traditional knowledge roles while competing with digital information sources.

A study of the libraries of 13 NAAC 'A' grade colleges, surveying librarians and 390 students, highlights how the libraries integrate traditional collections with advanced digital services such as RFID systems, AI research tools, mobile libraries, and book banks. These libraries also provide extensive e-resource access through platforms like N-LIST and institutional repositories, while offering inclusive facilities for diverse student populations.

Review of Literature:

Gene (1982) examines the evaluation of marketing within libraries and information services from 1970 onwards. Bates and Maack (2009) explain the concept of marketing and highlight its impact on library and information services (LIS) and describe how marketing ideas slowly became part of LIS and link these changes to general management concepts. Further, he discussed on where marketing in LIS might go in the future.

Pradhan (2014) stated that marketing in libraries focuses on understanding and meeting the needs of users; the marketing mix, consisting of product, price, place, and promotion, can be adapted to improve library services. These approaches help libraries create better services and attract a wider audience. Marketing is not limited to businesses it is also advantageous in non-profit settings like libraries, with the goal of increasing user satisfaction and improving service delivery. Jamaludin (2015) supported use of marketing strategies, like the marketing mix, can help libraries enhance user awareness and satisfaction. Garoufallou and others (2013) discuss about marketing in library and information services has evolved from simple advertising to a strategic management tool. It involves understanding user needs, enhancing service delivery, and building long-term relationships with users.

Alire (2007) advocates word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing; according to him, marketing is becoming more important for academic libraries. It encourages librarians to try more community-focused ways to promote their services.

Haglund, Lotta. (2009) emphasised relationship marketing and stated that relationship marketing is all about building strong, lasting connections between organizations and their users. In the context of libraries, this means focusing less on what the library does internally and more on what the users actually need and want. Simple tools like regular feedback and personalized communication can go a long way in strengthening these relationships and helping libraries grow and improve.

According to Taherdoost Jalaliyoon (2021) marketing has been shifted from traditional methods to online strategies, driven by technology and the internet. Ibe (2014) stated that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs provide excellent opportunities for libraries to share information and engage with users. Libraries can utilize these platforms to expand their reach and address the real-time information needs of their users without any geographical limitations. Suha and sultan (2018) considered social media as a vital resource for academic libraries to showcase their offerings. Mantha (2020) also found that social media

serves as a valuable tool for libraries to display their services and resources, enabling them to engage with users beyond in-person visits.

Vasileiou and Rowley (2011) highlighted that academic libraries often don't have clear marketing plans, especially for new digital services like e-books. Even though they use different ways to promote these services, their efforts are usually unplanned and not part of a bigger strategy. Spalding and Jian (2006). This paper explores how academic libraries in the U.S. use marketing to improve services and visibility. It shows that marketing helps libraries meet their goals by understanding the needs of students, faculty, and the wider community. The study highlights creative ways libraries promote their services and offers tips for creating effective marketing strategies. It concludes that using market research makes libraries more successful in serving users and gaining support from the campus and beyond.

Chandratre and Chandratre (2015) Libraries are changing the way they work to give people better access to information anytime, day or night. As part of this change, marketing is becoming more important, even though many library staff aren't used to thinking that way. Acharya (2023) also found Libraries have had to change to remain relevant and provide effective community services in today's digital age. In order to engage patrons, advertise services, and highlight the library's worth, marketing has become crucial.

The reviewed literature confirms that academic libraries must adopt marketing as a strategic necessity. From traditional word-of-mouth to advanced digital campaigns, marketing helps libraries stay visible, user-friendly, relevant, and essential to academic life. Particularly at the colleges in Mumbai, these strategies are critical for connecting with users, enhancing engagement, and ensuring sustainability. However, success depends on clear planning, staff training, technological infrastructure, and a deep understanding of user needs.

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the marketing practices of library services and assess user perceptions in NAAC A-grade academic libraries in western Mumbai suburbs. The quantitative approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for statistical analysis of data collected from a relatively large sample, facilitating objective measurement and comparison of variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research design is descriptive and cross-sectional in nature, aiming to provide a comprehensive snapshot of current marketing practices and their effectiveness in the selected academic libraries at a specific point in time.

Data Analysis and Findings

Library marketing has evolved from basic promotion to sophisticated strategies that include user experience design and digital engagement. This reflects changes in both marketing theory and library practice, with libraries now seeing users as active participants rather than passive recipients. **Marketing** library information products like databases, research guides, specialized collections, and information services requires strategies that show their unique value in today's information-rich knowledge society. These resources often represent major investments and need targeted

marketing to ensure people find and use them. Yet, despite their quality resources and facilities, these libraries often struggle with visibility, user engagement, and resource use problems that effective marketing could help solve. The research was undertaken to assess the marketing tools, techniques and strategies used by the librarians of the colleges and the perception of the students at the same colleges.

Librarian Perspectives:

- All librarians considered the importance of marketing (60% consider it very important, 40% extremely important).
- 90% of libraries market their services (50% occasionally, 40% frequently).
- Key challenges include limited resources, digital competition, and low awareness.
- Marketing strategies rely most on social media, posters/flyers, and student collaborations (66.7%), supported by emails and events (44.4%).
- Social media is viewed as a highly effective tool: 60% very effective, 30% extremely effective.
- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/LinkedIn, and other platforms are commonly used by the libraries.
- Website updates are routine: 30% weekly, 60% monthly.
- While half plan to use data analytics, only 20% currently do.
- Collaborations with faculty/student groups (50%) yield the most engagement.
- Adoption plans include student ambassadors, digital screens (55.6% each), AI chatbots (33.3%), and gamification (11.1%).
- Major Limitations stated by the librarians include a shortage of skilled staff and technology (66.7%) and budgets constrained (55.6%).
- 90% agree on the value of partnerships with academic departments and student groups.
- 80% want more personalized services, with 60% expressing this strongly
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User Perspectives:

- 92.5% of students believe marketing is important for libraries, emphasizing engagement and visibility.
- Social media is the preferred marketing channel, particularly Instagram (71.4%).
- Desired content includes study tips and recommendations (44.4%), new book updates (28.9%), competitions/quizzes (21.1%), and live Q&A (5.6%).
- Library events are very popular (93%), driving active engagement.
- About two-thirds routinely interact with promoted resources.
- Key challenges cited by users are low awareness, budget constraints, and limited engagement.
- 80% want more personalized services, with 60% expressing this strongly.
- Users showed interest in creative campaigns, peer-led outreach, and gamification.
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Conclusions:

The findings confirm that marketing is not just relevant but essential in academic libraries to increase awareness, improve resource utilization, and ensure user

satisfaction. Despite the growing importance, many libraries still rely heavily on traditional promotional methods, with limited use of digital tools and innovative practices. Social media platforms are underutilized, even though they offer immense potential for connecting with users, especially students. Moreover, staff shortages, lack of marketing expertise, and limited budgets were identified as significant challenges in implementing effective marketing strategies.

Importantly, libraries that embraced proactive and technology-driven approaches reported higher user engagement and better visibility of their services. This underscores the need for academic libraries to adopt a marketing mindset and develop structured, ongoing marketing efforts aligned with user expectations and technological trends.

Marketing is vital for relevance, awareness, and user satisfaction. Libraries using proactive, technology-driven strategies report higher engagement. Success depends on staff training, strategic planning, and consistent execution.

Recommendations:

- Integrate marketing into strategic planning and daily operations.
- Use innovative strategies like gamification, QR codes, and interactive content.
- Leverage platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and YouTube.
- Enhance engagement through workshops, events, and digital literacy sessions.
- Understand user needs through surveys and feedback.
- Address challenges with training, collaboration, and cost-effective tools.
- Document and share best practices internally.
- Form dedicated marketing committees for consistent execution.

By adopting a structured, user-centered, and tech-savvy approach, academic libraries can strengthen their presence, increase service usage, and foster meaningful engagement with their communities.

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